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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

13 December 1952

SUBJECT: NIE-78: THE WORLD SITUATION OVER THE NEXT DECADE

I. THE GENERAL SITUATION

1. A war situation now exists between the Soviet Bloc and the group of Western nations headed by the United States. Normal diplomatic negotiations have virtually ceased, and contact between the peoples is at an end. The armaments race is intense. An incessant stream of propaganda mobilizes public opinion on each side in support of the contest. The major nations of the world have taken positions on one side or the other of the contest, and there is no neutral bloc of sufficient power at the present time to wield substantial influence over the situation.

2. This situation of war will almost certainly continue throughout the period of this estimate, and will be the dominating factor in the world situation. The Soviet rulers are implacable in their antagonism towards the free world. They have made plain their intention to subvert or destroy it and to establish a Communist world dominated from Moscow. From time to time they may,

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for tactical purposes, bring about some relaxation of tension, but they do not admit the possibility of a general settlement or of any considerable period of peaceful co-existence between capitalism and communism. The Soviet Bloc at present shows no signs of disintegration or of substantial weakening, and its rulers are firmly in control. We therefore see no likelihood during the period of this estimate of a lessening of the extreme menace to US and free world security which is now presented by the force of the Soviet Bloc and of international Communism.

II. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE COMBATANTS

a. The Soviet Bloc

3. At present the economic and military strength of the Soviet Bloc is rapidly increasing. Bloc power and resources are under the control and centralized direction of the small ruling group in the Kremlin, and can be concentrated to almost any degree that the Kremlin desires towards the prosecution of the struggle with the West.

4. During the period of this estimate the Bloc will almost certainly retain its cohesion and centralized direction. The European satellites will remain under control of the Kremlin, and the Chinese Communists will develop a Soviet-type state and society, which will work in close accord with the USSR. The Bloc economy will

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probably continue to expand, and will be able simultaneously to support further capital expansion, increased military production, and increased production of consumers' goods.

5. The Bloc also will probably acquire during the period of this estimate a stockpile of atomic, and possibly of thermonuclear, weapons more than sufficient, if delivered on proper targets, to destroy the war-making potential of the West. The USSR will greatly improve its means for delivering these weapons. It will greatly improve its means of defense against attack by aircraft. At the same time it will maintain at least the present level of conventional armaments.

6. On the other hand, certain elements of weakness in the Bloc may become of increasing significance during the period of this estimate. For example, the extreme centralization of control in so vast an organization must lead to difficulties of administration and inflexibility of planning. Mistakes of judgment in the management of such an enterprise are difficult to rectify. Another potential source of weakness lies in the stratification which appears to be developing within the society of the USSR. A sharp division has long been evident between the privileged classes and the masses, and there is some indication of the existence of mutually antagonistic groupings within the privileged classes themselves. It is possible that in the course of time these

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various groups, becoming increasingly conscious of opposing interests, may create disharmonies sufficient to impair the monolithic character of the Soviet state.

7. Moreover, the relationship of the European satellites to the USSR, though it will probably remain one of subordination, may become increasingly costly in terms of mutual strains and stresses, which could reduce the satellites' net contribution to Soviet strength. The possibility also exists that conflicts of aim and interest between Peiping and Moscow may cause Communist China to play a role increasingly independent of Kremlin direction. Some of these potential weaknesses may be exploitable by methods of political warfare.

b. The West

8. The group of Western nations opposed to the Bloc does not operate under the centralized direction, totalitarian controls and ruthless methods characteristic of its adversary. A fundamental tenet of the West is that all peoples have the right freely to develop their own cultures and aspirations, and to adopt their own policies. This fact represents an element of Western strength because it assures the maximum of popular support for those policies which are adopted. On the other hand, it makes difficult the operation of a coalition except at times of great common danger. It affords public display to the disagreements and uncertainties within the common enterprise, and creates an impression of weakness often greater than the underlying

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facts would justify. The resources of the West are great, but their mobilization and direction depends on the pursuit of policies which are continually subject to modification or reversal by the force of public opinion. It is impossible to estimate with confidence the future course of such opinion, and of the policies which depend on it.

9. Assuming, however, that the principal Western countries maintain the present direction of their policy and pursue that policy with skill and resolution, we believe that internal security, morale, and anti-Communist sentiment on the whole will improve both within the Western coalition and within those states not now allied with either side. Some of the latter may enter into closer relations, or even into alliance, with the West. Production and productive capacity in the West will increase, perhaps at a slower rate than in the Bloc but probably at a pace which will widen the actual difference in output. The West will retain absolute superiority over the Bloc in these economic respects.

10. We believe also that the Western powers will maintain and expend their stockpile of atomic, and probably of thermonuclear, weapons to keep it at a size more than sufficient, if delivered on proper targets, to destroy the war-making potential of the Soviet Bloc. The West will greatly improve its means for delivering these weapons. It will improve its means for defense against attack by

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aircraft. The conventional armed forces of the West will markedly increase, especially within the NATO alliance.

11. On the other hand, the West will face numerous difficulties, most of them arising not from lack of physical resources but from the loose methods of organization and control which are characteristic of the Western system. The principal allies of the United States suffer from serious financial difficulties and dollar scarcities, rendering them vulnerable to economic crises and unable to devote a sufficient amount of resources to rearmament to render them defensible against Soviet attack. We cannot foresee, at this time, any final and satisfactory solution to this problem. It could lead to serious economic rivalries within the Western coalition, impairing the strength of the alliance and offering opportunities for exploitation by the political warfare of the Bloc.

12. Another major difficulty for the West is represented by the extreme political and social instability of numerous under-developed countries, where profound social changes are in progress entailing in many areas disorder and consequent vulnerability to Communist influences. This factor operates not only in some areas closely associated with the Western alliance, but in others such as the Arab-Asian countries which have not as yet taken a firm position in the world alignment.

13. Finally, it is always possible that members of the Western alliance will follow independent policies, sacrificing thereby the cohesion and impairing the purpose of the alliance. Germany and Japan, for example, have certain national objectives and necessities different from those of other countries of the West. West Germany might attain such stature over the next decade as to permit it, under nationalistic leadership, to strive for German unification and the recovery of lost German territories by force of arms. Under such leadership, a resurgent West Germany might create destructive conflicts within the North Atlantic Alliance and might increase the danger of general war.

III. COURSES OF ACTION OF THE COMBATANTS

14. Armed conflict has generally occurred eventually when two groups of great powers were in relations with each other like those at present existing between the Soviet Bloc and the West. At present the struggle is one in which only a few peripheral issues are being contested with military force. Neither side appears confident of possessing a sufficient preponderance of power to warrant an attempt to settle fundamental issues of strength by military force. Each side will attempt during the next decade to alter the world power situation in its own favor.

15. We believe that if the trends during the period of this estimate are such that neither side achieves a clear preponderance of

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power, neither side is likely deliberately to initiate general military conflict. It is impossible to estimate whether either side will acquire a clear preponderance of power during the next decade. Many developments could produce such a result -- sudden technological advance by one side or the other; the accession of important allies, or the falling-away of present allies, on either side; an appreciable economic recession in the West which was not controlled in time to prevent serious weakening; incorrect policies leading to such consequences as a substantial weakening of the air defenses of either side in relation to the offensive air capabilities of the opponent.

16. Moreover, it is possible that general war might be launched by one side or the other which should become convinced, whether rightly or wrongly, that an irreversible shift in the balance of military power was developing, that this shift constituted a grave threat to security, and that it could not be countered without recourse to general war. Likewise, if either side should conclude that attack by the other was imminent and unavoidable, and that the chance of surviving such attack would be improved by seizing the initiative and attacking first, it would almost certainly do so. We cannot predict whether, during the period of this estimate, either of these eventualities is likely to arise.

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17. If general war should occur, however, it is likely to do so not by deliberate initiation but as the result of an action, or of a series of actions and reactions, by the contestants which were not intended to have that result. Situations of tension such as those now existing in Korea, Indochina, Berlin, and Iran, could be expanded into general war by such a series of actions and counteractions. Other situations of tension, containing similar possibilities of expansion, will probably appear during the next decade.

18. We do not believe that any point in the next decade can now be selected as the moment of greatest danger of general war. In particular we do not believe that the Kremlin has set any date for the initiation of conflict. The situations mentioned above out of which general war might arise -- unexpected shifts in the world power situation, errors in judgment, misinterpretations by one side of the actions of the other -- these cannot be attributed to any given date or period in the future. The danger that general war may develop in such ways is great now, and will remain great throughout the decade. We would emphasize, however, that the timing of peak danger points during the decade will be dependent upon what the West does or fails to do as much as upon what the Soviet Union may succeed in doing.

19. Whether or not full-scale military conflict occurs during the next decade it is almost certain that intense political warfare will be continuously waged. There is reason to believe that the Soviet rulers

prefer the methods of political warfare, and look upon armed strife only as a last resort, or as a means of finishing a conquest already virtually completed by other modes of war. Soviet doctrine warns against embarking upon large military ventures without practical certainty of victory. Moreover, the Soviet rulers apparently believe that the West will inevitably weaken and decay through the operation of the inherent "contradictions" of capitalist society. They probably would not regard any stabilization in the West as permanent. Stalin has declared his conviction that economic difficulties will produce grave antagonisms within the Western camp.

20. We believe, therefore, that the Soviets have great confidence in their chances for achieving substantial successes against the West by methods of war which avoid the risk of general military conflict. They may therefore use their armed forces primarily to pose a constant menace to the West while they concentrate on seeking their objectives through the promotion of economic and political unrest. They may sponsor or wage a series of localized military operations in separate areas of the world, calculating that such actions will not expose the Communist power base to attack. They may consider that they can condition the West to respond continually to localized situations with localized programs. They may even estimate that the threat of an atomic attack against certain nations of Western Europe would be sufficient to bring about their capitulation.

21. Soviet objectives are promoted not solely by the seizure of territory but by every development of any nature that saps the strength of the West. The Kremlin will exploit every opportunity, probe every weakness, and cultivate every dissension which they can discover in the West. The degree of success which may attend these efforts is impossible to predict; it is certain, however, to depend in great measure upon the policies pursued and the strengths developed among Western countries. As with military conflict, the times of greatest danger for the West cannot be ascertained in advance. They can, to a considerable degree, be determined by the West itself.

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